Acknowledgements

Compiled and written by Sue Wesson.

Thank you to Illawarra Aboriginal community members and staff at DEC, Booderee NP, National Museum of Australia and State Forests NSW who contributed their time and effort to production of the resource use databases and book: Ron Avery, Alma Bell-Maskell, Aunty Rita Timbery-Bennett, Martin Bremner, Paul Carriage, Daniel Connolly, Rhonda Cruse, Uncle Jim Davis, Peter Ewin, David Kaus, Bernie McLeod, Kylie Madden, Rod Mason, Julie Ravallion, Jeff Timbery.

Data gathering and book production
Sue Wesson

DEC Advisors
Martin Bremner
Daniel Connolly
Jamie Erskine
Peter Ewin
Kylie Madden
Rod Mason
Julie Ravallion

Design and artwork
Artsmith

Paintings
Thankyou to Lorraine Brown, a member of the Coomaditchy Artists Co-operative (CUAC), for the use of her beautiful paintings which have greatly enhanced the design of this book.

Warning
Some food and medicine plants are dangerous, and the author and publisher accept no responsibility for any mishaps arising from the use of plants mentioned herein.
# Table of contents

*Acknowledgements*  
*Introduction*  
  *History of the project*  
  *Dharawal and Wodi Wodi: people of the Illawarra*  
  *Totems*  
  *Illawarra landscape*  
  *Aboriginal resources in the Illawarra*  
*About this book*  
*Pronunciation*  
*Marine habitat*  
*Intertidal habitat*  
*Estuarine habitat*  
*Coastal Plain habitat*  
*Escarment habitat*  
*Plateau habitat*  
*Appendix*  
*Bibliography*  
*Index*
Introduction

In 1996 the Commonwealth Government recognised the national importance of Australia’s indigenous peoples’ knowledge of plants and animals to the conservation of Australia’s biological diversity (Commonwealth 1996). It was recommended that resources be provided for the conservation of traditional biological knowledge through cooperative ethnobiological programs. This initiative was further supported in 2001 by the Commonwealth pledge to ‘maintain and record indigenous peoples’ ethnobiological knowledge’ as part of its ‘National Objectives and Targets for Biodiversity Conservation 2001-2005’. The New South Wales Government incorporated these principles into its *NSW Biodiversity Strategy* (1999, 2001) stating that: ‘Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander management practices have proved important for the maintenance of biological diversity and their integration into current management programs should be pursued where appropriate (NSW 2001).

History of the project

This project is part of a larger study known as the Illawarra Regional Aboriginal Heritage Study (IRAHS). The IRAHS is a NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) initiative in accordance with its Cultural Heritage Conservation Policy (2002). Regional studies fill a critical gap in Aboriginal cultural heritage management in NSW. For the past 30 years virtually all the activity in NSW in off-park assessment and conservation of Aboriginal heritage places and landscapes has taken place in the context of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA), in the form of localised impact assessment studies carried out by consultant archaeologists. The work of recording and assessing the significance of Aboriginal heritage places has thus taken place in piecemeal fashion. Regional studies constitute a key means for disseminating and grounding a holistic or multi-value approach to cultural heritage assessment and conservation.\(^1\) Regional Aboriginal heritage studies
serve not only to guide planning but also to encourage partnership with Aboriginal communities for environmental protection.

As part of the IRAHS an Aboriginal Illawarra resources database has been created to incorporate local Aboriginal community knowledge and all relevant oral and written material about Aboriginal connections with the flora and fauna of the Illawarra. A selection of items from the database has been used in the production of this book based on their importance in stories of country and as totems and for their diversity of uses.

**Dharawal and Wodi Wodi (Wadi Wadi): people of the Illawarra**

The Wodi Wodi\(^2\) are the Aboriginal custodians of the Illawarra who spoke a variant of the Dharawal language. Dharawal speakers lived and live in the country from Botany Bay and Campbelltown in the north through the Nepean, Wollondilly, Georges, and Cataract water catchments\(^3\), west to Moss Vale (Illillawatta) and south to the Shoalhaven River and Jervis Bay (Figure 1). Dharawal people are distinguished as fresh water or salt water people depending on whether they occupied the coastal regions or the plateaus and inland river valleys. Traditional stories tell of their arrival at the mouth of Lake Illawarra in canoes when the Ancestors were animals. They brought the Dharawal or Cabbage Tree Palm with them from the north and are named for this sacred tree (Figure 2).

---

1. Harrison, R. 2003. Western Sydney Regional Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Study Draft Documents, DEC.
2. Wodi Wodi can also been spelled Wadi Wadi. It should not be confused with a group on the Murray River bordering New South Wales and Victoria having a name with the same spelling and pronunciation.
3. ‘History of the D’harawal people (Bodkin.F@rbgsyd.gov.au/mount_annan_botanic_garden)
bind types of information with one another. In other words everything informs us about everything else and nothing can be considered in isolation. By contrast non indigenous knowledge structures involve hierarchical and increasing separation of information into ever smaller parts for detailed examination. Aboriginal knowledge stems from the practical experience of natural resources. Like all people that live with and close to the land they have developed an understanding of the interrelationships between ecological functions and broader patterns in climate and geophysical features. Understanding and learning the signals of change is indicative of the depth of knowledge that Aboriginal people have achieved.

As Phil Sullivan, a Ngiyampaa man explained recently; ‘Having a ‘totem’ is much deeper: it’s about looking after everything. Everything that’s associated with the animal, like the yellowbelly, I have to look after the fish, the water, the reeds – everything to do with that fish’ (Sullivan 2003).

Totems of the Illawarra include the Australian Magpie (Gymnorhina tibicen); calboonya or Superb Lyrebird (Menura novaehollandiae); kurungabaa or Australian Pelican (Pelecanus conspicillatus); bumbiang or Satin Bowerbird (Ptilonorhynchus violaceus); koondyeri or hawk, jugurawa or kingfisher, moondaar or

**Totems**

Totems are a significant symbol of Aboriginal people’s inextricable link to land. Aboriginal people gave recognition to the power of the plant and animal spirits by wearing skins and masks of ceremonial paint, and by mimicking, singing praise and dedicating prayers to specific plants and animals. They painted and engraved them in caves, rock overhangs and on rock platforms, on bark and burial trees and asked Mirrirul to guide them to plant and animal foods and to bless the spirit of the plant or animal that was killed. These acts allowed people to remain linked to the plant and animal guides and to accept the power they offer in lessons, in life, and in death. It reminded people that all animals are our sisters, brothers, and cousins and most importantly our teachers and our friends.

Mirrirul is a creator being who led the tribe to its present habitat and made the natural features as they are today. He also gave people their social laws and initiation rites.

As Phil Sullivan, a Ngiyampaa man explained recently; ‘Having a ‘totem’ is much deeper: it’s about looking after everything. Everything that’s associated with the animal, like the yellowbelly, I have to look after the fish, the water, the reeds – everything to do with that fish’ (Sullivan 2003).

Totems of the Illawarra include the Australian Magpie (Gymnorhina tibicen); calboonya or Superb Lyrebird (Menura novaehollandiae); kurungabaa or Australian Pelican (Pelecanus conspicillatus); bumbiang or Satin Bowerbird (Ptilonorhynchus violaceus); koondyeri or hawk, jugurawa or kingfisher, moondaar or

---

4 In other places Mirrirul is called Daramalun (far south coast NSW), Nurunderi, Bunjil, Goin or Biral.

5 This responsibility also includes the bird that eats the fish (Mason 2004).

6 Wombarra is the Dhurga word for the black duck, the language of the people occupying the country from the Bega River to Lake Conjola (Wesson 2000: 158).
Pacific Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*); bibburdugang red-bellied black snake (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*) and jindaola or Lace Monitor (goanna) (*Varanus varius*). Mooloone; the waratah (*Telopea speciosissima*) is valued in ceremony and as an indicator for the timing of ceremonies and is the subject of many stories of country (Figure 3). Aboriginal people do not eat their personal totem plant or animal but care for it by conducting increase ceremonies to ensure its good health and reproduction. Sometimes, however, they are obliged to kill their totem to feed their family members and others in their group. Increase ceremonies were and are conducted by people who are of the totem animal or plant and enact historical travels and deeds of the ancestral totemic heroes, especially at places where they rested or were transformed.7

Many animals and birds feature in traditional stories for the Illawarra and adjacent regions. These stories are still being used to teach principles and history by the direct descendants of Ellen Anderson.8 A list of the stories and their sources can be found in the Appendix.

Dharawal people moved throughout their territories and to a lesser extent those of neighbours (Gundangurra, Darug, Dhurga, Awabakal and Wiradjuri) subject to season and purpose. They had favoured travel routes running north-south and east-west but travelled widely caring for the country in ceremony and practice and harvesting only what was immediately required. People from other language groups including Gundangurra and Wiradjuri travelled from the inland to the coast to exchange foods, raw materials and artefacts. The fish, oysters, water-fowl and grubs of the Illawarra were particularly valued by inland people. Dharawal and Awabakal shared ceremonies including the ceremony for the brown snake and the shark.9

Aboriginal peoples’ association with the Illawarra has a history that began thousands of years before Europeans colonised the Australian continent. In that time the landscape has been transformed by ice ages, the deposition of sand dunes approximately 6,500 years ago and the inundation of once dry land to create Lake Illawarra 6,000 years ago (Fuller 1980: 7). Aboriginal people have survived and adapted to the impact of European colonisation and kept their connection to the land through the maintenance of customs and stories and the responsibility for country.

In 1838 a census of Aborigines living in the Illawarra named 49 men, 25 women, 23 boys and 27 girls living in 20 different camps and belonging to ten groups.10 These were Wollongong (Woolungah), Kiama, Tom Thumb lagoon (Tuckulung), Windang (Berrawurra), Shellharbour (Wonwin), Bulli (Wangewarra), Dapto,

---

8 Mason 2004 personal communication.
9 Ibid.
10 This number may not reflect pre-European reality and is probably conservative.
Red Point (Dhgillawarah), Jamberoo and Taitpoly (place unknown), a total of 124. A south coast group usually numbered 70 or 80 (Hoben 1897). Sixty three years later, the 1901 census showed that there were 33 people living at Port Kembla, 13 at the Minnamurra River, 8 at Dapto, 18 at Bombo, 20 at Gerringong, 3 at Jamberoo and 3 at Kiama, making a total Illawarra Aboriginal population of 98.  

The Illawarra is now also home to Aboriginal people who have originated from other Australian regions. They have migrated for employment, change and to maintain family connections.

**Illawarra landscape**

The study region extends from Stanwell Park in the north to Bass Point in the south (Figure 8) and comprises a spectacular landscape from the visually dominant escarpment and sandstone plateau in the west to the coastal plain which broadens in the south. Lake Illawarra is a significant large coastal lake, one of many on the south coast. The area supports a great diversity of vegetation communities typically including eucalypt forests and woodlands on the plateau, rainforests on the escarpment and grassy woodland, swamps, grasslands and scrubs on the coastal plain (Figure 4). Estuaries and coastal wetlands have been heavily modified by infilling, drainage, altered river systems, artificial streams and diversions. Areas in the coastal plain have been modified first with agriculture and more recently for housing developments. However, the Illawarra region retains pockets of beautiful natural environments, particularly the broad sandy beaches and protected areas of the plateau including Royal National Park, Dharawal State Conservation Area and the catchment areas on the plateau above Wollongong.

The landscape has been considered as six broad landscape zones (Figure 5); plateau, escarpment, coastal plain, estuarine, intertidal and marine. Many species inhabit more than one zone and this is indicated in the text.

---

11 44 females and 54 males (1901 Commonwealth Census).

12 The NPWS vegetation assessment (August 2002) has identified 55 vegetation communities for the Wollongong LGA.
Aboriginal resources in the Illawarra

‘[The] life cycles of native flora provide information to Aboriginal people on the movements of wildlife, sometimes a great distance away. There has been very little local traditional knowledge recorded as to how Aboriginal people use seasonal flower patterns not only to indicate the availability of food and medicinal ingredients but also as a special ceremonial event which has recurred over a long period. Plants play an important role in the spiritual life of Aboriginal people and are associated with important ceremonies. Laws specify that plants cannot be damaged without consent from those responsible for their care’.13

Water, stone, clay, plant and animal resources are the raw materials that provided a rich and healthy quality of life for Illawarra’s people. Fresh water, which is key to the survival of all people, came from rivers, streams, lakes and swamps. The coastal plain has an abundance of permanent streams and lakes. By contrast the Woronora Plateau can be very dry and has fewer permanent waterways than the coastal area. To alleviate this situation the Dharawal chiselled channels fed by swamps into the sandstone rock platforms and connected these with man-made wells (see Figure 6). Ochres and stone artefact materials (including basalt and silcrete) were mined from quarries and traded sometimes long distances. A broad range of habitats exists in the Illawarra from sandy and rocky marine and intertidal environments to woodland, forest, rainforest, swamp, heath, saltmarsh, shrubland and grassland.

‘Aboriginal people recorded their plant knowledge orally as part of the traditional way of recording the history of the area in which they lived. Much can be learned from these histories concerning the animals, plants and people who live in the area’ (Mason 2001).

Material for this book has been drawn from knowledge in the Illawarra Aboriginal community, Aboriginal stories about the environment, books and databases about Aboriginal plant use, videos, archaeological texts and historical documents. Very early records of the Dharawal and Wodi Wodi names for plants were provided to William Macarthur in the mid 1850s by an Aboriginal man known as Doctor Ellis.14 More recently Rod Mason, great-grandson of Ellen Anderson15, has provided a wealth of information about the seasonal indicators and uses of plants. Rod states that Ellen was not only a great story teller but also an important knowledge holder about the life cycles of plants, animals and seasons and the people associated with them.16

---

13 Mason 2001 database.
14 Doctor Ellis was recorded in 1836 and 1840 blanket censuses (Organ 1990: 200, 255–6, 305) as being of the Bong Bong or Berrima district born circa 1810 but was later a noted resident of Wollongong. Early recordings of Dharawal names for plants were made by McKenzie (1874), Maiden (1889), Campbell (1900), McCaffrey (n.d.) and Brown (1964).
15 Ellen Anderson was born at Lake Illawarra circa 1855.
16 Mason 2004 personal communication.
Seasonal knowledge for the harvesting of food resources was and is an important determinant in the timing of journeys, gatherings and festivals. In recent post-contact history similar journeys and gatherings have taken place through the focus of Aboriginal people's employment. At Robertson, Moss Vale and the Burragorang Valley they collected and sold wattle bark for leather tanning.\(^{17}\) On the coast they have a long history of involvement in the commercial harvesting of crops including beans, peas and corn (as casual labourers) and of fish and abalone (in Aboriginal family businesses).

Australian native foods come from berries, leaves, tubers, flowers, seeds, nectars and insect larvae such as grubs. The combining of different parts of plants such as flower petals, seeds and leaves provided nutritionally balanced meals.\(^{18}\) Plants and animal fats are used to create medicinal poultices, juices and healing smoke for external use. Internal medicine includes berries, teas and decoctions. In the Illawarra swamps and lagoons provided important medicinal plants:

>'When we were living on Hill 60 old Mrs Timbery lived there. If anyone got sick she used a lot of herbs from around the swamp. Down the back, where they have filled it in with rotten coalwash, we had another big swamp, with all the herbs growing around there'.\(^{19}\)

Artefacts such as spears (karmai), woomeras (womra), boomerangs (bumarin), shields (hilamin), canoes (maduri) were made from timbers, gums and resins (Figure 7). Nuts, feathers, teeth, ochres, animal skins and plant fibres were used to create decorative clothing, cloaks and both everyday and ceremonial

\(^{17}\) Ibid.

\(^{18}\) Mason 2001, Mason 2003 personal communication.

\(^{19}\) Wakeman 1987: 15.

Figure 7: Etchings from Brough Smyth 1878
ornamentation. Leaves, bark and stems were used to make baskets, string, rope, nets and toys. Bark, stems and leaf fronds made short-term shelter structures. The smoking of leaves high in aromatic oils was used not only for healing but for ceremonial cleansing, to prepare the ground at a camp and for long-distance communication. Variants in the smoke (colour, density, height and duration) communicated different meanings.

Distinct land forms could be distinguished from a distance by the colouring and form of the tree species associated with them. There are trees that are specific for use by men and others by women. These distinctions determine what may be gathered and by whom including twigs for fire making.

Ceremonial areas are marked by certain trees which may be carved with significant designs to define the area. Trees were also marked to indicate a burial using both symbols and drawings. During gatherings trees were marked to define the temporary home areas for a visiting group:

‘The visiting groups would be allocated an area to camp within Yandel’ora [Campbelltown] and would stay for weeks and sometimes months. Trees were marked to demarcate ‘lands within lands’ for different groups’.

Seasonal plant indicators tell people when plants or animals are in season or available, coming out of hibernation or giving birth from their flowering, fruiting or presence. The indicator can inform about the presence of another plant or animal across long distances or in close proximity. For example, the flowering of an inland wattle informs about sea mammals and the flowering of a coastal plant informs about the bogong moth. A plant or animal may inform about resources in the country of adjacent but culturally different people, perhaps speaking another language and having different customs.

Two Aboriginal groups sometimes agreed to share a resource whereby one group accessed the mid-season and another the beginning or end of the harvesting season of a plant or animal. The plant indicator creates an association or family of plants and animals that are linked to the indicator species. For example, the bandicoot makes a family or association with the bangalow palm, the vanilla lily, heath banksia, coast banksia, native grape, black plum, chocolate lily, soft tree-fern, wombat berry, native cherry, geebung, king fern and wild parsnip.

Seasonal patterns which were derived from the weather and from hunting and gathering governed the lives of the old Dharawal people. This became the people’s culture and has been passed down through knowledge holders.

\[\text{20} \] It was important to rid a camp area of stinging insects and grubs such as bull ants and stinging caterpillars (Mason 2004 personal communication).

\[\text{21} \] Mason 2004 personal communication.

\[\text{22} \] Timbery, Jeff 2003, Collins 1798.

\[\text{23} \] Tyermann and Bennett 1825.

\[\text{24} \] rbgsyd.gov.au.

\[\text{25} \] Mason and Young 2001 Plant Use database, Mason 2004 personal communication.

\[\text{26} \] Mason 2004 personal communication.
About this book

This book is arranged by six broad landscape zones; marine, intertidal, estuarine, coastal plain, escarpment and plateau (Figure 5). Aboriginal people describe these habitats as different countries each having their own language and people. A comprehensive index of common and scientific names can be used to find the plants and animals that are included within the book. It represents a portion of the entries that have been recorded in the Illawarra Aboriginal Use flora and fauna databases by DEC. The introduction to each section describes the landscape zone with an image of a typical scene and the Dharawal names for some plants and animals that do not have detailed use notes. The body of text for each zone devotes at least one page to a species or genera. It provides Dharawal and Gundangurra names, common names, the most recent scientific name, the part used, the season of use and the landscape zones (there is often more than one) in which the plant or animal may be found. Each species profile includes an image, a guide to the way in which the plant or animal is used and use notes. Wherever possible these notes are in the words of a local person, either a resident of the Illawarra or somebody with Dharawal connections. Historical anecdotes from the Illawarra are also included as well as more general references where appropriate. The bibliography includes details of all the reference material used in compiling the book including oral histories.

Pronunciation

There are a few fairly simple rules for the pronunciation of all Australian Aboriginal languages: As a rule, u is like the oo in the English word 'boot', i like the vowel in 'bit' and a like that in 'hat'. If a vowel letter is doubled, then pronounce it very long. B can be substituted for p, d for t and g for k with no difference to the meaning of the word. English distinguishes between b and p but most Aboriginal languages don't. Australian languages recognise a distinction between two kinds of r sound. There is the trilled sound, written rr, similar to that heard in Scottish English, and a liquid sound, r, similar to that in normal Australian English. Where dh or th is written, they indicate a sound like d or t but with the tongue touching the teeth. The hardest sound for English speakers to master is ng. English does have this sound, but only at the end of a word; it is the sound after the a in 'bang'. Australian languages have ng at the beginning of words.

27 Aboriginal cosmologies do not place human beings in a superior status to plants and animals but consider all beings (plants, animals, rocks and spirits) as being equally worthy and are all referred to as people (tree people, goanna people, rock people etc.).

28 There are 225 entries for flora, 70 for mammals, 80 for birds, 42 for reptiles, 57 for fish, 17 for crustacea and 30 for shells.

29 The scientific naming tradition for plants and animals uses two (often latin) words to describe each plant or animal. For example, Eucalyptus obliqua, is the scientific name for the messmate. Eucalyptus is the generic name and obliqua is the species or specific name. There are lots of eucalypts but only one species known as Eucalyptus obliqua.
